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Henry, Heath. "Why students need summer vacation." *Dallas News*. *Dallasnews.com*. 31 May 2008. Web. 5 Aug. 2010.

The following is excerpted from an article by a history teacher published in an online daily newspaper.

I remember the trend in the 1980s and '90s toward year-round schools. Most places that adopted a full-year calendar have since returned to the more traditional format because students and facilities could not take the additional stress.

Summer is a good time for younger students to have a chance to just be kids. Most elementary students get about 15 minutes for recess during the school day. Add at least two to four hours of homework a week, and the result is a youngster who gets less yard time than your average prison inmate.

Older students can get summer jobs. This not only helps put money in their pockets, but the work usually makes them appreciate school and education more. They can also use the time to attend longer camps or summer activities in areas they have acquired an interest in, such as band, athletics or camping.

Most adults (including myself) have fond memories of three full months of summer jobs, summer camps, summer vacations and lazy summer days.

Most teachers disagree with me about reducing the school year, and some tell me it needs to be even longer. Their thinking revolves around the TAKS [state-mandated tests in Texas]. Teachers need as much time as possible to prepare students for these high-stakes tests, and every day is valuable. However, I believe our continued emphasis on standardized tests is the best argument for shortening the school year.

We put too much stress and anxiety on 8- to 16-year-olds. Even at 16, a student is not ready for this physical and emotional bombardment. Unfortunately, instead of giving them more time off to recuperate, we make them stay in school longer than ever before.

TAKS testing takes place throughout the school year, but the last round takes place in the last week of April/first week of May. That's a month before the end of school.

I have studied the curriculum of different subjects and grade levels. By my calculations, after pushing the students through the curriculum for TAKS, there is about 6 percent of the subject matter left to teach after the test, but 11 percent of the year remains. How much TAKS preparation time would we miss by cutting time at the end of the year?

Another argument I hear is the fact that other industrialized nations have longer school years than ours. This is mostly true, but it is not a fair comparison.

Many nations have longer, more strenuous primary education systems. However, most of these nations have cultural and societal perceptions about education that are markedly different from ours. American students have a stronger attachment to society outside the classroom than their foreign counterparts.

An average inner-city high school in Berlin, Tokyo or Delhi has students who enter the room with a higher level of motivation and academic responsibility than similar students in Houston or Dallas. American teachers must work much harder than their counterparts just to keep students' attention.

To compete with other nations' educational systems will take more than just matching the number of days. Our children and culture are different from those of other nations. American children are active participants in our society, not academic automatons. And they need more time off.